

MEDIA GIRAFFE Project

*Innovation for democracy;
Standing above the crowd*

<http://www.mediagiraffe.org>



Media Giraffe Project Summary

(http://www.newshare.com/giraffe/project_summary.html)

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The Media Giraffe¹ Project (MGP) is a one-year research initiative housed with the journalism program at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. Its mission is to help citizens find and support democracy-focused media -- as both consumers and creators. It does so by:

- *Finding and spotlighting individuals making innovative, sustainable use of media (old and new) to foster participatory democracy and community.* The individuals (or organizations) are (a) starting and supporting independent local and topical publications, electronic and new media – profit, non-profit or cooperative or (b) uniquely using existing media to hold government or major private interests accountable to democratic values.
- *Developing tools for consumers to find and support objective, quantifiable, professional standards for media responsiveness to democratic values.* These tools may include a web-content recommendation service, or training on how to consume, and create, media that foster democracy.

The Media Giraffe Project responds to public concern that our nation's media are failing to equip citizens with knowledge they need to demand open, honest, accountable and participatory self government. This threatens effective democracy and strong communities. At the same time, some view American journalism -- print, electronic, online -- as adrift, lacking a sense of mission, perhaps even a sense of purpose. Journalists are unsure whether a new era of weblogs ("blogs") and "citizen journalism" can support whatever mission they pursue, and insecure about the willingness of their customers to support that mission.

Together these efforts are intended to uncover and illustrate market forces promoting media responsiveness to the information needs of a sustainable democracy, including support for literacy, civic participation and reflection of justice, equality, fairness, free-speech and open-government values. In

¹ -- "Media Giraffes" are (a) passionate, even idealistic, about truth telling and fostering democracy, (b) have or are taking significant personal risk (financial or to their reputation), (c) often are pioneering in "new" media, and (d) recognize that "you have to eat" -- their efforts are in some way sustainable as an enterprise, profit or not-for-profit.

addition, they may produce ideas for structural rules changes which might increase the competitive and marketing advantages of independent media.

The Project is assisted by scholars, works in collaboration with reformers inside media, and with activists outside the industry. It is research-driven and non-partisan.

The one-year pilot phase:

- 1) Spotlights individuals and organizations starting and supporting independent local and topical publications, electronic and new media -- profit, non-profit or cooperative.
- 2) Publishes -- via a book, articles, web services, multimedia, a documentary film and speaking engagements -- "how-to," step-by-step examples of individuals ("giraffes") using media (old and new) in innovative ways to advance U.S. democracy.
- 3) Documents any market forces promoting media responsiveness to the information needs of a sustainable democracy, including support for literacy, civic participation and reflection of justice, equality, fairness, free-speech and open-government values.
- 4) Joins in documenting the extent to which established media institutions and their managers are able, within the current media financing and regulatory structures, to treat the fostering of democracy as a primary mission.
- 5) Presents ideas for structural rules changes which might increase the competitive and marketing advantages of independent media and the responsiveness of established media.
- 6) Joins in considering convening a summer/fall 2006 summit conference on the structure of the U.S. media industry, the impact of the Internet on its financing models, including copyright, and how democracy is affected.
- 7) Will determine whether to establish an ongoing, independent, non-profit Media Giraffe Project beyond the one-year pilot phase and deliverables.

The pilot project is assisted by scholars, and draws upon the insights and experiences of both media insiders and activists. We examine entrepreneurs and mavericks within both independent, local, new-media efforts as well as "giraffes" who are sticking their necks out in traditional, major media. Both selected for profiling are (a) passionate, even idealistic, about truth telling and fostering democracy, (b) have or are taking significant personal risk (financial or to their reputation), (c) often will be pioneering in "new" media, and (d) recognize that "you have to eat" -- their efforts are in some way intended to be sustainable as an enterprise, profit or not-for-profit.

The book, for publication by the University of Massachusetts Press, will be a series of 15-20 human-interest profiles -- in a Q&A format .

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